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HORIZON IN HELL

TO THE INFANTRYMAN, A WAR IS ONE FIELD WIDE. THERE IS A MACHINE-GUN ACROSS THAT FIELD, MASKED BY A HEDGEROW. WHEN HE HAS CROSSED THE FIELD, AND IF HE IS NOT DEAD, THE INFANTRYMAN SILENCES THE MACHINE-GUN AND THEN THERE IS ANOTHER FIELD TO CROSS AND ANOTHER GUN. IT IS A SMALL, PERSONAL WAR, WITH AN HORIZON IN HELL...

THIS IS THE STORY OF ONE DAY IN THAT WAR.

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Chapter 1. 0500 Hours

THIS STORY BEGAN AT DAWN ON A STONY ITALIAN HILLSIDE IN THE BITTER SUMMER OF 1944. THE SUN ROSE. IT PRICKED THROUGH THE EYELIDS OF NEW ZEALANDER CORPORAL BILL NEEDHAM OF ABLE COMPANY...

THAT SUMMER THE EIGHTH ARMY WAS PIVOTING TOWARDS THE GERMAN GOTHIC LINE NORTH OF FLORENCE. THE NEW ZEALAND DIVISION HELD THE RIGHT FLANK. BILL NEEDHAM CLIMBED STIFFLY AND WARILY TO HIS FEET...

I REMEMBER NOW... THERE WERE THREE TIGERS HULL DOWN BEHIND THE RIDGE... AND ABLE COMPANY WALKED SLAP INTO THE SHELLS...

THE 4TH. BATTALION HAD ADVANCED TOO FAR TOO FAST AND THE GERMANS HAD COUNTER-ATTACKED. AT DUSK SHERMANS HAD SUPPORTED THE NEW ZEALAND INFANTRY, CORPORAL BILL NEEDHAM REMEMBERED...
ABLE COMPANY MUST HAVE BEEN WIPED OUT BUT I GUESS THE WAR'S GOING ON SOMEWHERE.. AND THAT'S WHERE I'VE GOT TO BE...

AT THAT MOMENT, DANGER WAS COMING OVER THE STONY RIDGE IN STEEL-TIPPED BOOTS...
SQUAREHEADS... SO THE BATTALION MUST HAVE PULLED BACK IN THE NIGHT WHILE I WAS KNOCKED OUT IN THAT SHELL HOLE. WELL, THIS IS WHERE ABLE COMPANY TALKS BACK...

Horizon In Hell

CORPORAL BILL NEEDHAM RAN COOLLY, WEAVING, USING THE SLOPE.
COME AND GET ME THEN, SQUAREHEADS... BUT I WARN YOU, I'M GOING TO ARGUE...

A SCARRED TREE TRUNK LAY AT THE EDGE OF THE WOOD. THE CORPORAL CLEARED IT ONE-HANDED, FALLING TO COVER WITH SLACKENED MUSCLES.

Horizon In Hell

TWO GERMANS HAD DIED WHEN THE GUN STOPPED CHATTERING. IT STOPPED SUDDENLY. ONE OF THE LIVING GERMANS YELLED SHARPLY IN THE SILENCE.
HECK! IT'S JAMMED!
THE BAYONET... GIVE HIM THE BAYONET...

NOW THERE WAS PANIC IN THE CORPORAL'S HAND AS IT SLAPPED THE MAGAZINE OF THE JAMMED TOMMY GUN. EVEN A VETERAN IS AFRAID OF DEATH WHEN IT LUNGES TOWARDS HIM AT THE SHARP POINT OF A BAYONET. BUT IN THAT TENSE MOMENT, ANOTHER GUN RIPPED UP THE SILENCE...

A HIDDEN TOMMY GUN WAS HITTING THE GERMANS FROM BEHIND. CORPORAL BILL NEEDHAM GRINNED SUDDENLY. ONE MAN WAS STILL CHARGING AT HIM, BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING HE COULD DO ABOUT THAT NOW.
THANKS, PAL, WHOEVER YOU ARE... BUT YOU CAN LEAVE THE LAST ONE TO ME...
THE BAYONET CAME DOWN HARD... BUT CORPORAL BILL NEEDHAM ROLLED SMOOTHLY FROM UNDER IT...
AAACH!
THE ENEMY WAS OFF BALANCE WHEN THE KIWI STRUCK...

CORPORAL BILL NEEDHAM STRAIGHTENED UP. HIS THROAT WAS DRY. EBBING TENSION HAD STIFFENED HIS LIMBS. THE HILLSIDE WAS VERY QUIET IN THE STONY SUNLIGHT, BUT HE WAS NOT ALONE NOW...
THE TWO LIVING MEN MET AMONG THE DEAD. ONE HAD SAVED THE LIFE OF THE OTHER WITH THAT KILLING BURST FROM HIS TOMMY GUN. NEITHER OF THEM WASTED WORDS ON IT. THAT WAS THE WAY IT HAPPENED, IN BATTLE...
FRANK SMYTHE, ISN'T IT? CHARLIE COMPANY?
YEAH. THE GOONS WITH THE PRISONERS HAVE CLEARED OFF.. I RECKON WE'D BETTER DO THE SAME...

BILL NEEDHAM STAYED THE OTHER MAN FOR A MOMENT .
HANG ON... WHAT HAPPENED TO THE REST OF ABLE AND CHARLIE ?
BRIGADE PULLED THEM BACK LAST NIGHT TO GET THE KINK OUT OF THE LINE. THAT WAS AFTER THE TIGERS HIT US. I STAYED BEHIND WITH THE MAJOR... A SNIPER GOT HIM IN THE HEAD...

THE TWO CORPORALS TURNED AND HEADED DOWN THE SLOPE...
ACCORDING TO THE MAJOR, WE'RE ALL OF TWENTY [redacted] BEHIND THE BERRY LINES NOW...
WELL, I RECKON WE COULD BOTH DO WITH A WALK

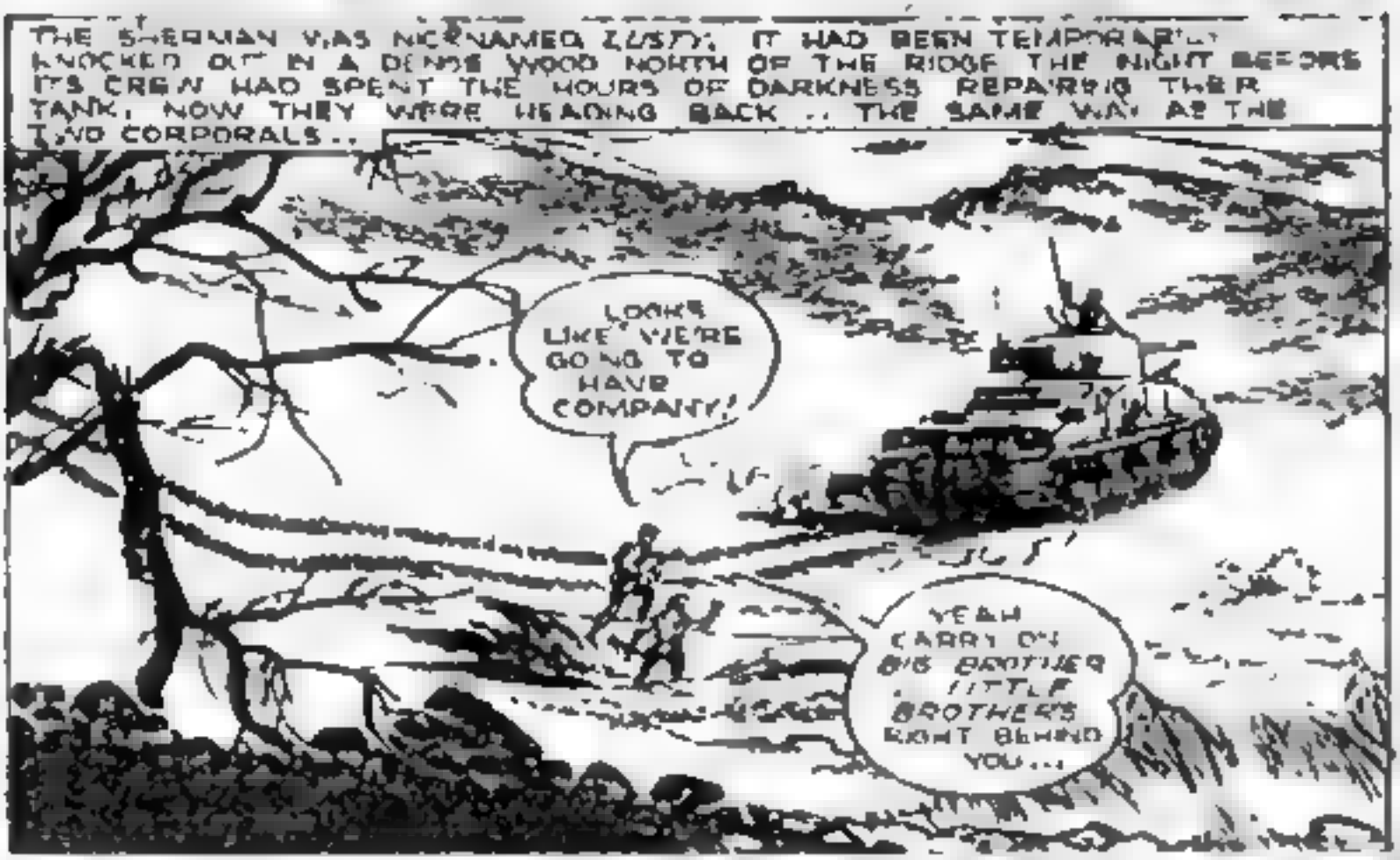
THEY WERE NOT HEROES, THESE TWO MEN THERE WAS NO GLORY AHEAD OF THEM, ONLY TWENTY HARSH MILES OF HEAT AND DUST AND THE THREAT OF DEATH. IN THE INFANTRY THERE ARE FEW HEROES BUT THERE ARE A LOT OF OBSTINATE MEN WHO WANT TO STAY [redacted] AND LIVE
WHAT'S UP, FRANK ?
I KEEP HEARING THE SO NO THOSE TIGERS, MADE, CLANKING UP THE RIDGE AHEAD OF US LAST NIGHT BEFORE THE SHELLS DROPPED...

BUT THE FAINT SOUND OF METAL ON METAL WAS NOT AN UGLY ECHO OF CORPORAL SMYTHE'S MEMORY. AS THE TWO MEN BROKE FROM THE FAR SIDE OF THE WOOD, THE GRATING ROAR OF A HEAVY DIESEL ENGINE HALTED THEM ON STIFF LEGS...

THE NEW ZEALANDERS RAN FOR COVER. THE TANK WAS STILL HIDDEN IN THE WOOD BEHIND THEM, BUT NOW THEY COULD HEAR THE BRITTLE CRACKING AND SPLINTERING OF THE TREES UNDER THE STEEL TRACKS ..

DEATH IS NEVER FAR FROM THE INFANTRYMAN. WHEN AN ENEMY TANK READS TOWARDS HIM WITH ITS THICK ARMOURED SKIN AND SEARCHING GUNS, DEATH IS VERY NEAR AND THERE IS NO WAY OF STOPPING IT
IT'S COMING STRAIGHT FOR US..
YEAH.. AND IT'S NOT GOING TO LISTEN TO ANY ARGUMENTS WE CAN PUT UP...
TEN SECONDS LATER, THE MONSTROUS STEEL SNOUT APPEARED OUT FROM THE TREES AND...

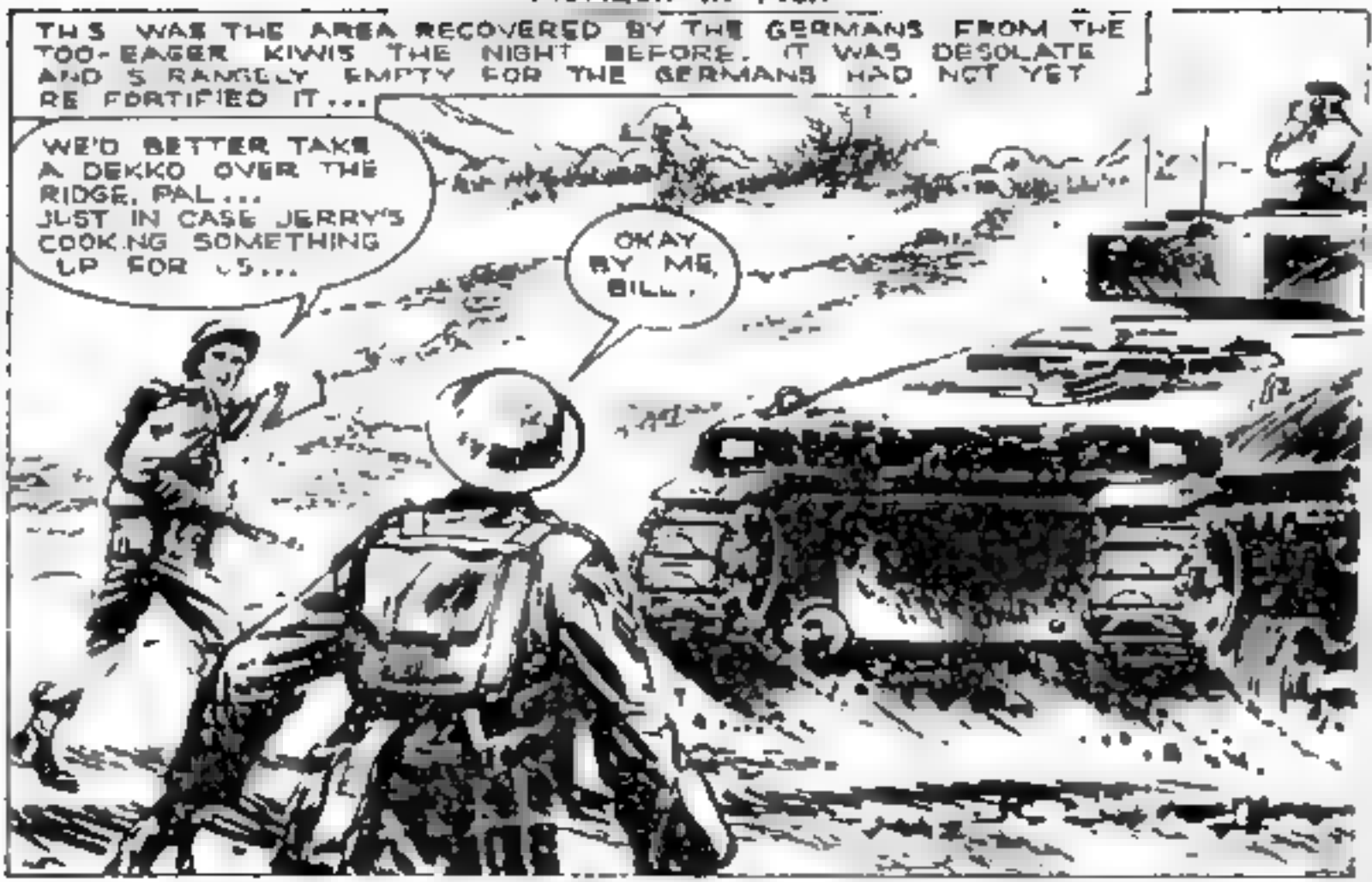
THE TWO CORPORALS SHOUTED SIMULTANEOUSLY AS THE GUNS OF THE STEEL MONSTER SLEWED ROUND TOWARDS THEM... AND SWUNG BACK AGAIN WITHOUT FIRING...
HEY... IT'S ONE OF OUR OWN SHERMANS!
WHAT A TURN-UP FOR THE BOOK!


THE SHERMAN WAS NICKNAMED 'LUSTY'. IT HAD BEEN TEMPORARILY KNOCKED OUT IN A DENSE WOOD NORTH OF THE RIDGE THE NIGHT BEFORE. ITS CREW HAD SPENT THE HOURS OF DARKNESS REPAIRING THEIR TANK. NOW THEY WERE HEADING BACK ... THE SAME WAY AS THE TWO CORPORALS...
LOOKS LIKE WE'RE GOING TO HAVE COMPANY!
YEAH CARRY ON BIG BROTHER LITTLE BROTHERS RIGHT BEHIND YOU...

Chapter 2. 0800 Hours

BIG BROTHER... IT WAS AN AFFECTIONATE NAME THE INFANTRY SOMETIMES GAVE THE HEAVILY-ARMOURED TANKS WHICH LUMBERED INTO BATTLE BESIDE THEM. THE INFANTRY THEMSELVES WERE LITTLE BROTHER, VULNERABLE TO EVERY BULLET THE ENEMY COULD THROW AT THEIR UNPROTECTED BODIES...

IN TWO WARY HOURS, THEY HAD COVERED FOUR MILES.


THIS WAS THE AREA RECOVERED BY THE GERMANS FROM THE TOO-EAGER KIWIS THE NIGHT BEFORE. IT WAS DESOLATE AND STRANGELY EMPTY FOR THE GERMANS HAD NOT YET RE FORTIFIED IT...
WE'D BETTER TAKE A DEKKO OVER THE RIDGE, PAL... JUST IN CASE JERRY'S COOKING SOMETHING UP FOR US...
OKAY BY ME, BILL.

AS THE TWO CORPORALS CLIMBED THE SLOPE TOGETHER, THE TANK COMMANDER GAVE A BRIEF ORDER.
DRIVER... KEEP THE SPEED AT FIVE MILES AN HOUR.. STEADY ON COURSE...

THESE MEN WERE VETERANS, THE TANK COMMANDER AND THE TWO CORPORALS. THEY DID THEIR JOBS WITHOUT DISCUSSION.
ARE WE GOING THROUGH FAST, BILL?
I RECKON SO, PAL... IF THERE'S AN M.G. ON THE OTHER SIDE I WANT TO GET MY SAY IN FIRST...

THE [illegible] WERE TOO THICK TO SEE THROUGH, TOO HIGH TO SEE OVER. THERE WAS ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT WHAT LAY ON THE OTHER SIDE...

IT WAS A KNIFE-EDGED SLOPE WHICH LAY ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BUSHES. THE TWO CORPORALS FELL AWKWARDLY, UNBALANCED BY THEIR MOMENTUM, SLITHERING DOWNWARDS IN A FLURRY OF DUST AND LOOSE STONES...

BLAZES!

THE TWO CORPORALS WERE THIRTY YARDS BELOW THE RIDGE BEFORE THE SHELVING GROUND BROUGHT THEM TO A STANDSTILL WITH BLEEDING FINGERNAILS AND BRUISED SHOULDERS. IT WAS A GRIM SITUATION INTO WHICH THEY HAD FALLEN...
ACHTUNG! ENEMY SOLDIERS! SCHNELL, SCHNELL!

A NORTH-SOUTH ROAD RAN ALONG THE FLOOR OF THE VALLEY AND THE GERMANS HAD BEEN QUICK TO SITE MACHINE-GUNS ON THE SLOPES ABOVE IT TO HINDER ALLIED MOVEMENT WHEN THE NEXT ATTACK CAME. BUT ALREADY THOSE GUNS HAD FOUND A TARGET.
WELL, WE FOUND OUT WHAT WAS ON THE OTHER SIDE...
YEAH, BUT WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?
CAUGHT IN THE LETHAL CROSSFIRE OF THE SPANDAUS, THERE WAS NOTHING THE TWO KIWIS COULD DO BUT HUG THE STONY GROUND. DEATH STITCHED THE AIR SIX INCHES ABOVE THEIR HEADS AND ON THE ROAD BELOW, THE NET WAS CLOSING...
HALT, KARL.. FIRE WHEN THEY SHOW THEIR HEADS.
THE M.G.'S ARE LETTING UP.. WHAT GIVES?
THERE'S YOUR ANSWER PAL. DOWN ON THE ROAD..

CORPORAL FRANK SMYTHE SAW THE GERMAN SOLDIERS HEADING STOLIDLY UP THE SLOPE FROM THE ROAD BELOW. THE MACHINE-GUNS HAD STILLED AND SUDDENLY THE CORPORAL WAS ANGRY...
BUTTONED UP AS NEAT AS A GENERAL'S TUNIC, PAL .. THAT'S US...
YEAH? I'VE GOT A MAGAZINE THAT DON'T AGREE ..

WHAT CORPORAL SMYTHE DID THEN WAS INSTINCTIVE, BRAVE .. BUT VERY FOOLISH...
WATCH IT FRANK.. FOR PETE'S SAKE.

THE TWO CORPORALS WERE VETERANS. THEY HAD GOT TO BE THAT WAY BY CALCULATING THE ODDS... AND THE ODDS THIS TIME WERE TOO HEAVY. FRANK'S ANGER BURNED ITSELF OUT IN ONE USELESS BURST FROM HIS TOMMY-GUN. HE DIVED FOR COVER AGAIN...

I'LL TAKE A CHANCE ANY DAY, PAL, BUT I'M NOT COMMITTING SUICIDE...

OKAY, BILL... I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT.. PANIC OVER...

THE SPANDAUS HAD STOPPED FIRING. IN THE STONY SILENCE, THE TWO TRAPPED MEN LAY IN THE SMALL PRISON OF THE HOLLOW AND LISTENED TO THE GUTTURAL COMMANDS FROM THE SLOPE BELOW...

FORWARD! THERE ARE ONLY TWO OF THEM AND THEY ARE SOLDIERS ... NOT SUPERMEN! TAKE THEM!

HIGH ON THE HILLSIDE THE GERMAN GUNNERS WAITED, THE GRIPS OF THE SPANDAUS IN THEIR SWEATING HANDS. ONLY THE GREY-CLAD SOLDIERS MOVED ON THE BARE SLOPE, CLIMBING STEADILY UPWARDS FROM THE ROAD...

NEIN... THEY WILL NOT STAND UP AND FIGHT, THE TWO TOMMIES! SO THEY ARE SENSIBLE MEN... NOT DEAD ONES...

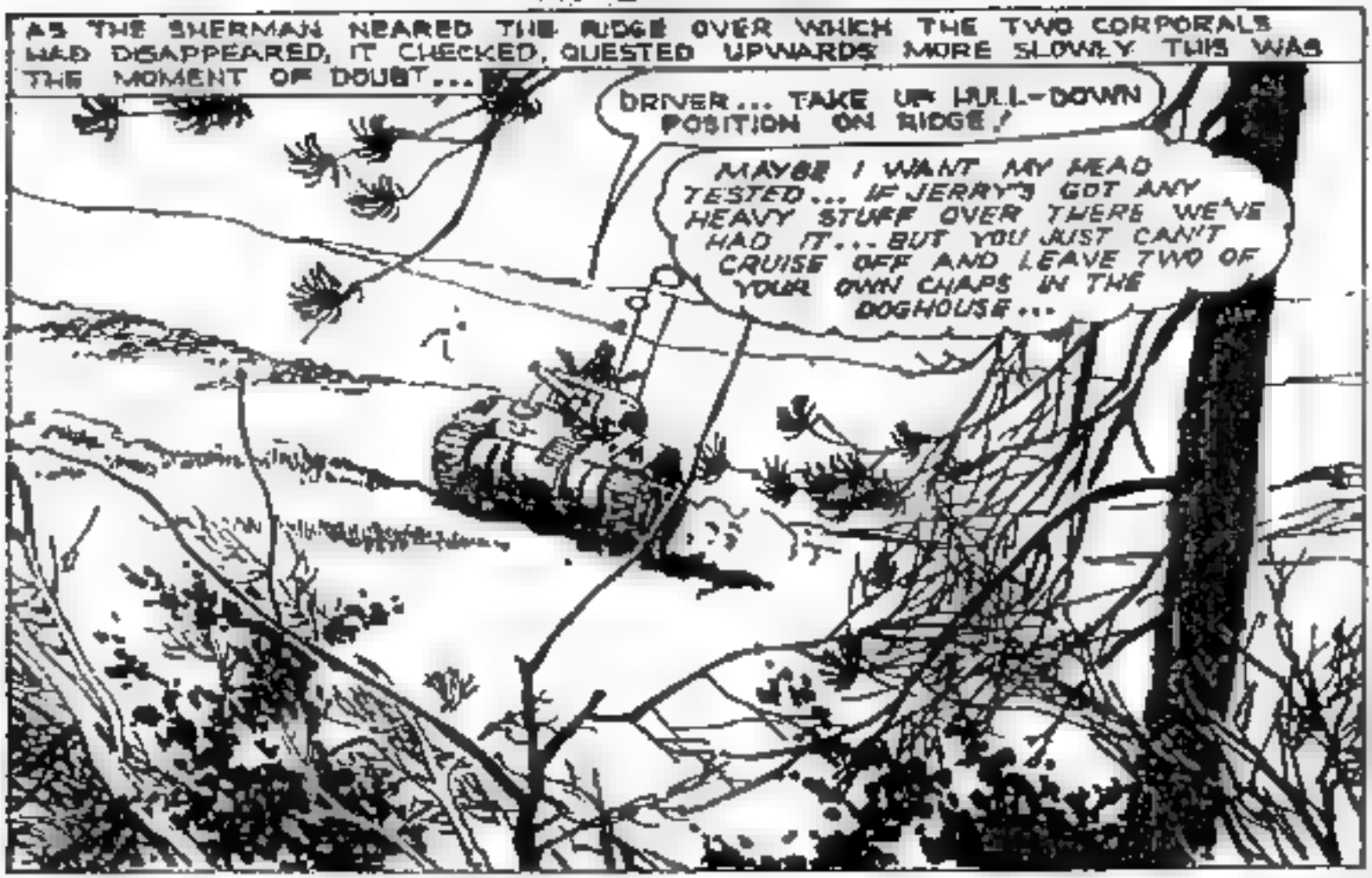
THE SUN BEAT DOWN INTO THE HOLLOW WHERE THE TWO VETERANS CROUCHED. THEIR WAR WAS ENDING HERE. THEY WERE NOT BITTER, ONLY HOPELESS NOW AND SUDDENLY VERY TIRED...

WELL... THIS IS IT, PAL... IT'S A P.O.W. CAGE WE FOUND ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THOSE BUSHES...

YEAH... BUT AT LEAST WE'VE WARNED THE TANK BOYS TO STEER CLEAR OF TROUBLE... THEY'LL BE ON THEIR WAY...

BUT A THOUSAND YARDS AWAY ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIDGE, THE SHERMAN WAS ALREADY TURNING BACK. THE TANK COMMANDER HAD MADE HIS DECISION...
DRIVER... LEFT... FURTHER LEFT... THAT'S IT! BARWELL... GUN AND MACHINE-GUN ACTION!

THERE WAS A BELLIGERENCE IN THE COMMANDER'S VOICE WHICH CAME THROUGH EVEN THE TINNY RUSTLE OF THE INTERCOM. IT PUT HARD GRINS ON THE FACES OF THE *LUSTY'S* CREW, CROUCHED AT THEIR STATIONS IN THE ROARING METAL DARKNESS OF THE TANK...
MINTER ..LOAD MACHINE GUN AND HAVE SHELLS READY! I DON'T KNOW WHICH I'LL WANT UNTIL WE CLEAR THE RIDGE!
THAT'S THE STUFF! IT'S ABOUT TIME WE BEGAN DISHING IT OUT!


AS THE SHERMAN NEARED THE RIDGE OVER WHICH THE TWO CORPORALS HAD DISAPPEARED, IT CHECKED, QUESTED UPWARDS MORE SLOWLY. THIS WAS THE MOMENT OF DOUBT...
DRIVER... TAKE UP HULL-DOWN POSITION ON RIDGE!
MAYBE I WANT MY HEAD TESTED... IF JERRY'S GOT ANY HEAVY STUFF OVER THERE WE'VE HAD IT... BUT YOU JUST CAN'T CRUISE OFF AND LEAVE TWO OF YOUR OWN CHAPS IN THE DOGHOUSE...

THE TANK COMMANDER HAD TAKEN A CALCULATED RISK AND AS LUSTY BRUSHED THROUGH THE THICK SCRUB ON THE RIDGE TO TAKE UP HER HULL-DOWN POSITION, HE KNEW THAT IT HAD PAID OFF.
BARWELL ...TAKE THE JERRY TROOPS FIRST. MACHINE-GUN. MAXIMUM DEFLECTION.

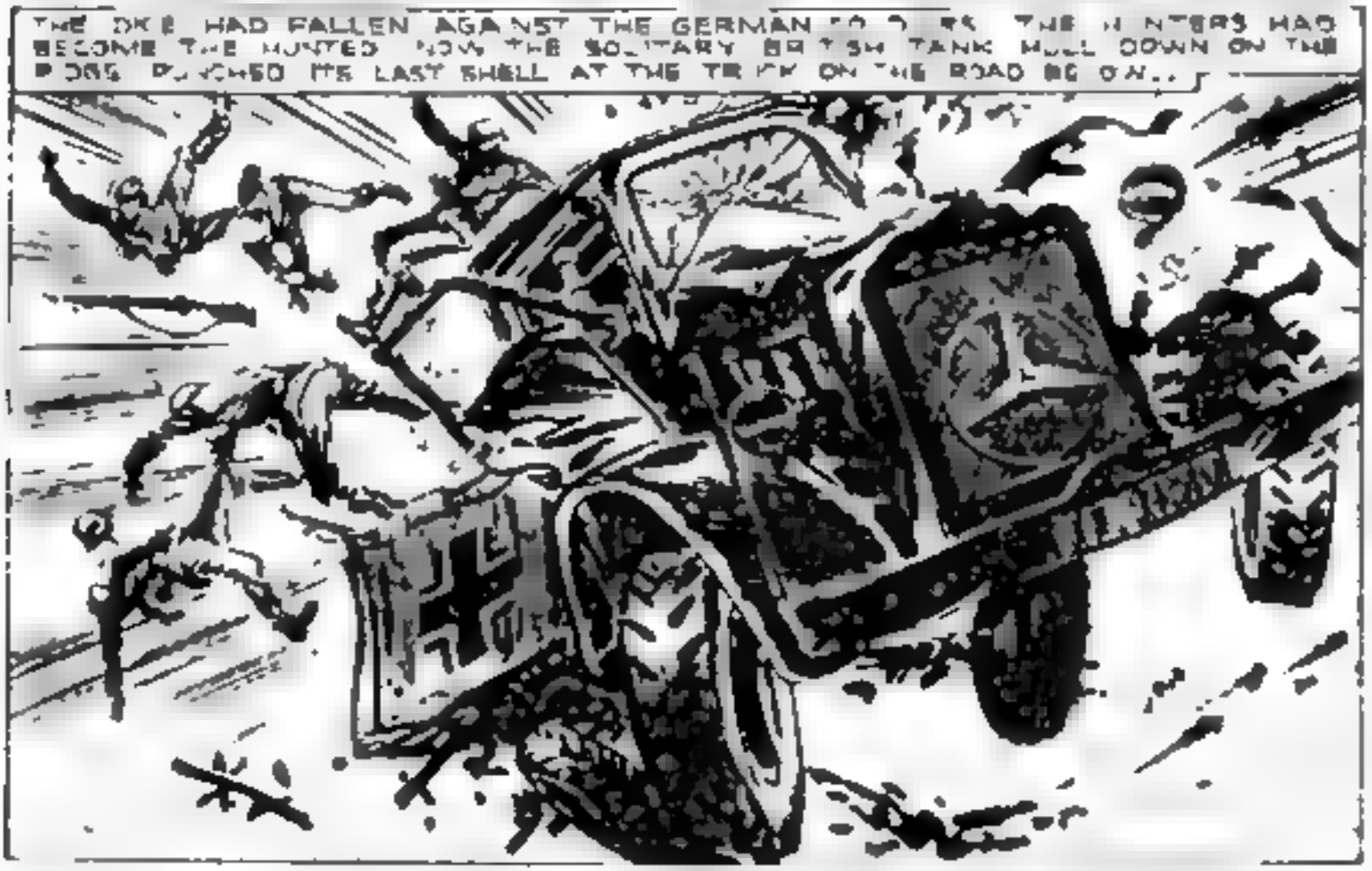
Horizon In Hell

A MAN'S COURAGE IS A VITAL FACTOR, BUT IT IS THE WEAPON HE HOLDS THAT DECIDES A MODERN BATTLE. THE CORPORALS' TOMMY GUNS HAD BEEN POWERLESS AGAINST THE GERMAN SPANDAUS. NOW THE MACHINE-GUNS WERE POWERLESS AGAINST THE 75 M M. GUN OF THE SHERMAN.
FIRE!

THE SHERMAN'S FIRST RANGING SHOT FELL TEN YARDS FROM THE GERMAN MACHINE-GUN POST. THE SECOND SHELL WAS ON TARGET...

INSIDE THE CREW COMPARTMENT OF THE SHERMAN THE WIRELESS OPERATOR CLENCHED HIS LIPS AGAINST THE FUMES OF THE LAST DISCHARGE AND SLAMMED ANOTHER ROUND INTO THE BREACH...
TRAVERSE LEFT... STEADY ON!
SEEN ANYTHING OF THOSE TWO CORPORALS, SAM? I BET THEY'RE ENJOYING THIS!
AS THE TANK PUT ANOTHER SHELL SQUARELY ON THE SECOND SPANDAU NEST, CORPORAL BILL NEEDHAM LUNGED ON STIFF LEGS FOR THE SLOPE ABOVE. THE TRAP HAD BEEN SPRUNG...
COME ON, PAL. I RECKON THOSE SQUAREHEADS HAVE LOST INTEREST IN US SINCE BIG BROTHER TURNED THE HEAT ON THEM!

THE TWO CORPORALS HAD FOR SOME TIME NOW LEARNED TO ACCEPT THE FALL OF THE DICE. NOW, REPRIEVED BY THE INTERVENTION OF THE SHERMAN THEY SCRAMBLED UP THE STEEP SLOPE TO THE SHELTER OF THE ARMOURED MONSTER AND ITS POWERFUL GUN
FIRE!


THE DICE HAD FALLEN AGAINST THE GERMAN TO-DAY. THE HUNTERS HAD BECOME THE HUNTED. NOW THE SOLITARY BRITISH TANK MULL DOWN ON THE RIDGE PUNCHED ITS LAST SHELL AT THE TRUCK ON THE ROAD BELOW...

THE VALLEY WAS SILENT AND STILL AGAIN IN THE BRIGHT MORNING SUNLIGHT . AND IT WAS THE SILENCE AND STILLNESS OF DEATH...
WELL... LET'S GO .

BIG BROTHER HAD SAVED LITTLE BROTHER FROM CAPTURE OR DEATH BUT IT WAS ONLY A SMALL INCIDENT IN A BIG WAR. THE TANK COMMANDER LIFTED HIS HAND BRIEFLY AS THE GERMAN BACKED AND TURNED...
THANKS, CHUM .. WE'LL DO THE SAME FOR YOU ONE DAY...

Chapter 3. 1100 Hours

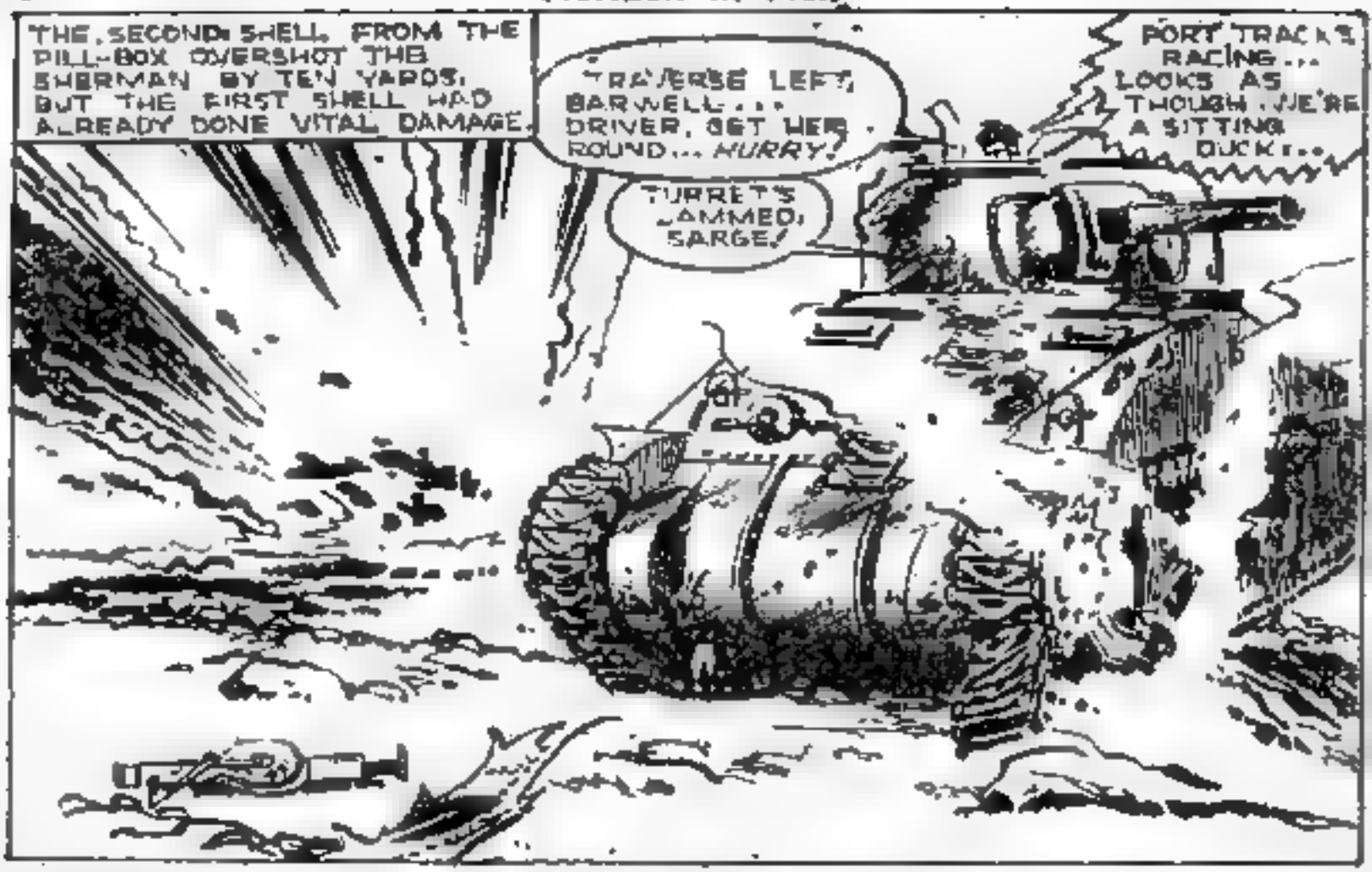
BUT THE AREA SEEMED AS EMPTY AND DEAD AS THE RUINED PILL-BOX WHICH LIFTED A BATTERED CONCRETE OUTLINE ABOVE THE STONES FORTY YARDS FROM THE SHERMAN...
THE BOYS SURE MADE A MESS OF THESE JERRY DEFENCES WHEN THEY PASSED THROUGH...

BUT THE JUNK YARD WAS NOT AS LIFELESS AS IT SEEMED. THE WRECKED DEFENCES HAD BEEN IN GERMAN HANDS AGAIN FOR TWELVE HOURS AND THEY WERE CUNNING HANDS...
SO THE HAUPTMANN WAS RIGHT.. THE ENEMY DOES NOT EXPECT TO FIND GUNS IN A WRECKED PILL-BOX. THE FOOLS...

IF THE NEW ZEALAND ATTACK CAME THIS WAY AGAIN, THEY WOULD LEARN THAT EVERY RUINED STRONGPOINT WAS A DEATHTRAP... AS THE SHERMAN *LUSTY* WAS LEARNING NOW...

THE FIRST SHELL FROM THE CUNNINGLY-CONCEALED GUN PLOUGHED UP DUST FIVE YARDS FROM THE EXPOSED FLANK OF THE BRITISH TANK. IN THE SAME MOMENT, A MACHINE-GUN OPENED UP AT THE TWO CORPORALS...

HECK... THAT HORNET'S NEST HAS STILL GOT A STING IN IT...


THE SECOND SHELL FROM THE PILL-BOX OVERSHOT THE SHERMAN BY TEN YARDS, BUT THE FIRST SHELL HAD ALREADY DONE VITAL DAMAGE.
"TRAVERSE LEFT, BARWELL... DRIVER, GET HER ROUND... HURRY!"
"TURRET'S JAMMED, SARGE!"
PORT TRACK'S RACING... LOOKS AS THOUGH WE'RE A SITTING DUCK...

UNDER FULL POWER, A TANK IS THE DEADLIEST WEAPON IN MODERN BATTLE. CRIPPLED, ITS GUNS IMMOBILIZED, IT BECOMES A CLUMSY HUNK OF USELESS METAL. CORPORAL BILL NEEDHAM PEERED GRIMLY ACROSS AT THE SILENT, LUSTY...
LOOKS AS THOUGH BIG BROTHER'S GOING TO NEED OUR HELP NOW ...AND QUICK!...
YEAH... WELL, I'M GAME...

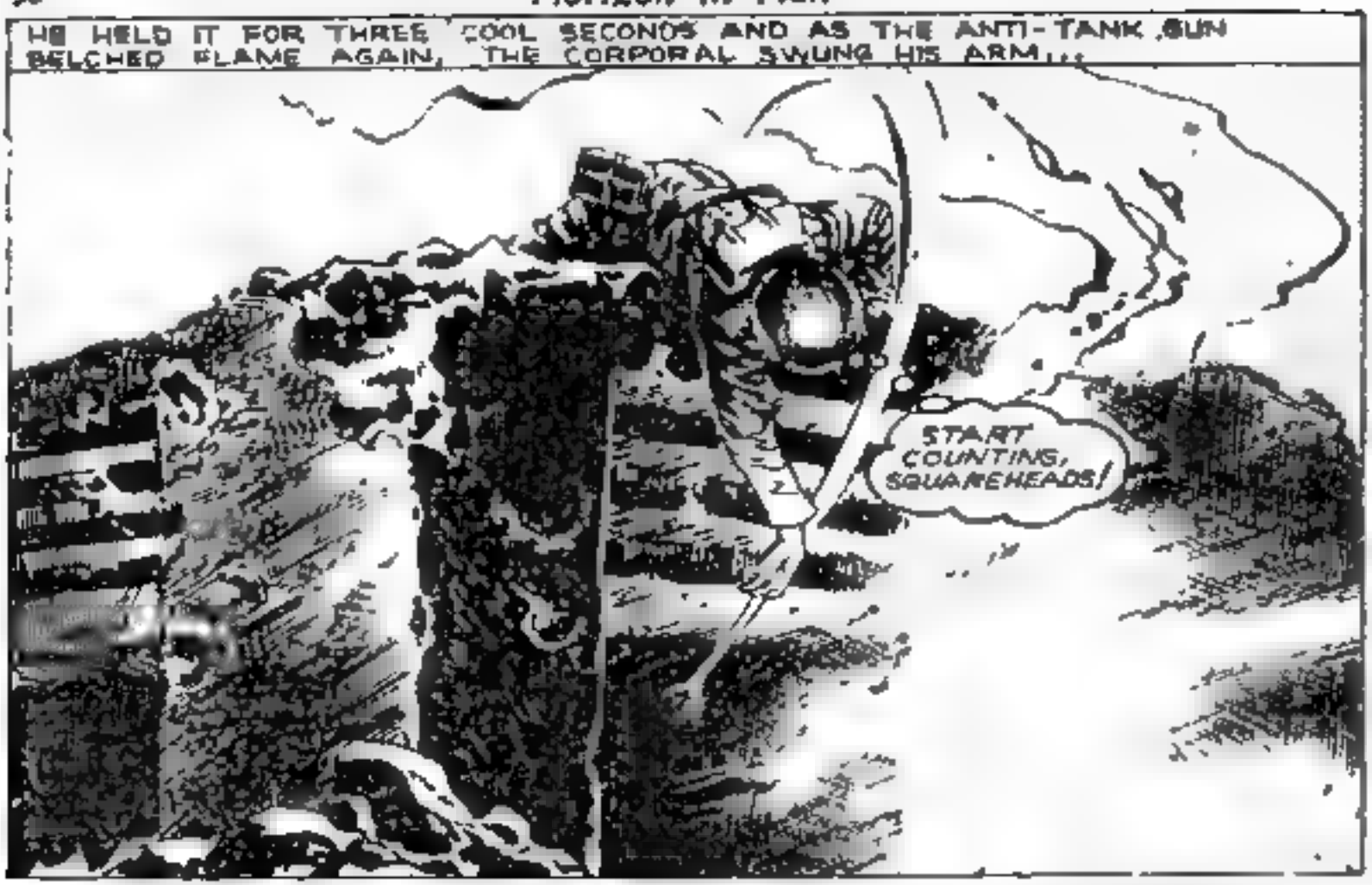
THE TWO VETERANS USED FEW WORDS. THEY KNEW THEIR JOB. THE JOB WAS WAR. SOMETIMES THE WAGES WERE DEATH, BUT THAT WAS A CHANCE A MAN HAD TO TAKE...
COVER ME, PAL!
RIGHT!

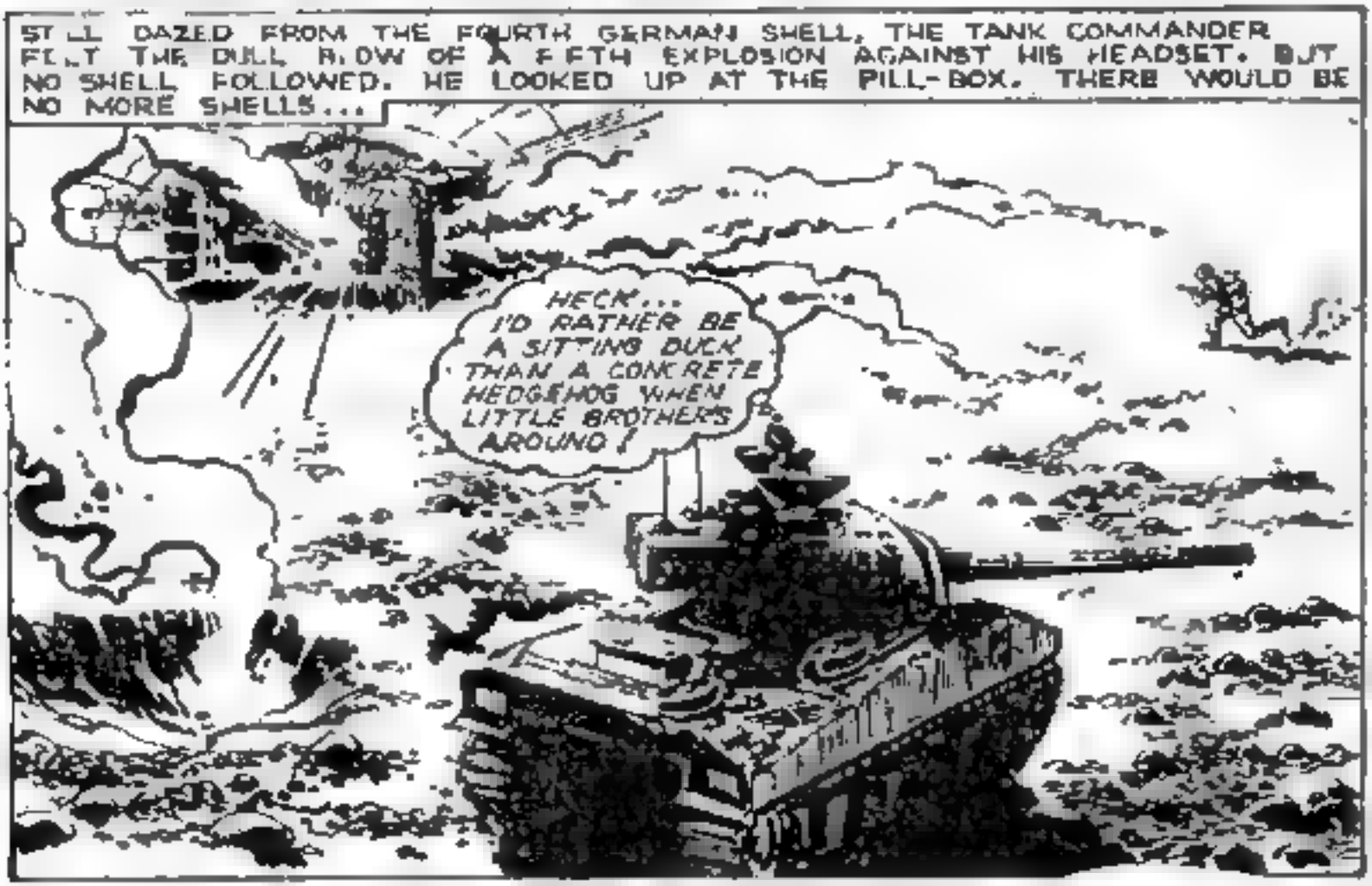
IN THE TURRET OF THE CRIPPLED SHERMAN, THE TANK COMMANDER SAW THE FIGURE DODGING TOWARDS THE PILL-BOX. HE TOOK A DEEP BREATH...
THANKS LITTLE BROTHER .. WE'VE STILL GOT A CHANCE WHILE YOU'RE ON YOUR FEET...

CORPORAL NEEDHAM WAS FIFTEEN YARDS FROM THE PILL-BOX WHEN THE ENEMY GUNNERS SAW HIM. THE HOT MUZZLE OF THE MACHINE GUN SWUNG VICIOUSLY TOWARDS HIM...

THE CORPORAL RAN FAST, WEAVING, THE HOT WHISPER OF THE BULLETS FANNING HIS CHEEK. THE SMASHED PILL-BOX LOOMED AHEAD OF HIM...
HE'S MADE IT .. BUT HE'D BETTER START DISHING IT OUT BEFORE THAT ANTI-TANK GUN GETS THE RANGE...

ACRID SMOKE WR,THED BACK FROM THE GERMAN ANTI-TANK GUN NTO CORPORAL NEEDHAM'S FACE. HE CROUCHED ON THE FLAT TOP OF THE PILL-BOX. HIS HAND REACHED FOR THE GRENADES NSIDE HIS BATTLEDRESS .
NEAR MISS AGAIN .. THOSE SQUAREHEADS MUST HAVE GOT THE JITTERS... MAYBE THEY NEED A PILL IN THAT PILL-BOX OF THEIRS ...
THE CORPORAL DREW THE PIN OF THE GRENADE WITH HIS TEETH ...


HE HELD IT FOR THREE COOL SECONDS AND AS THE ANTI-TANK GUN BELCHED FLAME AGAIN, THE CORPORAL SWUNG HIS ARM...
START COUNTING, SQUAREHEADS!
2


STILL DAZED FROM THE FOURTH GERMAN SHELL, THE TANK COMMANDER FELT THE DULL BLOW OF A FIFTH EXPLOSION AGAINST HIS HEADSET. BUT NO SHELL FOLLOWED. HE LOOKED UP AT THE PILL-BOX. THERE WOULD BE NO MORE SHELLS...
HECK... I'D RATHER BE A SITTING DUCK THAN A CONCRETE HEDGEHOG WHEN LITTLE BROTHERS AROUND!

THE GERMAN PILL-BOX WAS GUTTED. THE DARKNESS IN THERE WAS BITTER WITH CORDITE AND DEATH. QUIET. BUT VETERANS TAKE NO CHANCES...

THE TWO CORPORALS FACED EACH OTHER AT THE DOOR OUTSIDE THE BLOCKHOUSE. THEIR VOICES WERE HARSH IN THE SILENCE...
THE JOB'S DONE, PAL...
YEAH... THIS ONE'S BUT I RECKON THERE'LL BE OTHERS!

THE SHERMAN'S CREW WAS ALREADY WORKING ON THE WRECKED TRACK. BILL NEEDHAM LOOKED AWAY TO THE LOW HILL WHICH STOOD ABOVE THE PLAIN...
OKAY, MEN... THE INFANTRY'S SAVED LUSTY .. IT'S UP TO US TO GET HER MOVING AGAIN ..
WE'D BETTER TAKE A DEKKO FROM THAT HILL WHILE THE TANK BOYS ARE WORKING.. THERE MAY BE JERRIES AROUND WITH ITCHY FINGERS ..

TOGETHER THE TWO CORPORALS CLIMBED THE EASY SLOPE OF THE HILL BEYOND THE PIL - BOX. IN WAR, A MAN DOES WHAT HAS TO BE DONE .. AND THE NEXT STEP IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE LAST .
WATCH IT, PAL... SQUAREHEADS .. WITH A HOWITZER, ON TOP OF THE HILL..

THE GERMAN SOLDIERS WERE GROUPED AROUND THEIR GUN ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE WOOD WHICH OVERLOOKED THE PLAIN. THE TWO CORPORALS COULD SEE THEM CLEARLY AS THEY CRAWLED WARILY FORWARD...
THEY HAVEN'T SEEN US YET... WE'LL TAKE IT NICE AND EASY...

BUT THESE GERMANS WOULD NEVER SEE ANOTHER TARGET...
IT'S OKAY PA... JERRY'S SITTING THIS ONE OUT...
THEY'RE DEAD... BY HECK!

Horizon In Hell

PROBABLY AN A'IED AIRCRAFT HAD SHOT-UP THE ENEMY BATTERY THE DAY BEFORE. THE TWO CORPORALS TOOK A BRIEF LOOK AT THE TABLEAU AND TURNED THEIR BACKS ON IT. THEY WERE ALIVE, AND DANGER WAS ABSENT FOR THE MOMENT...

I NEEDED THIS CIGARETTE, PAL

YEAH.., IT'S GOOD TO BE ALIVE.

THEY'VE GOT THE SHERMAN ON THE MOVE, PAL... THE WAR'S STARTING AGAIN!

ELEVEN MILES TO GO.

IT HAD TAKEN THE CREW OF *LUSTY* AN HOUR TO CHANGE THE WRECKED TRACK AND FREE THE TURRET. IT WAS NOON ON THAT ONE DAY OF WAR AS THE SHERMAN ROLLED SOUTH AGAIN TOWARDS THE BRITISH LINES...

Chapter 4. 1400 Hours

THE COMMANDER HELD THE SHERMAN AT HALF-SPEED TO KEEP ENGINE NOISE TO A MINIMUM. THEY WERE NEARING THE FRONT NOW. THE CORPORALS WALKED AHEAD, WARILY. EVEN THE FARMHOUSE ON THE SLOPE AHEAD COULD HIDE GERMANS...

IT LOOKED DESERTED, THE FARMHOUSE. THE WINDOWS GAPED LIKE EMPTY EYE SOCKETS IN A SKULL. THE GROWL OF THE SHERMAN'S ENGINE ECHOED THROUGH BARE-FLOORED ROOMS. BUT FOR A SINGLE MOMENT, THERE WERE LIVING HANDS ON THE SILL OF AN UPSTAIRS ROOM...

IT WAS ONLY A MOMENT, BUT IT WAS LONG ENOUGH FOR EYES SHARPENED BY FOUR YEARS OF WAR. FOUR MEN SAW THAT QUICK BLUR OF WHITE IN THE EMPTY WINDOW OF THE FARMHOUSE IT WAS THE SHERMAN'S DRIVER WHO SHOUTED FIRST...
SARGE... THERE WAS A FACE IN THE WINDOW OF THAT FARMHOUSE! I SAW IT!
ALL RIGHT, GAINSFORD .. SO DID I! BRAKES...

IT TOOK THE TANK COMMANDER TWELVE SECONDS TO MAKE HIS DECISION. THE WAR FORCES SUCH UGLY DECISIONS ON ORDINARY, KINDLY MEN WHO ARE ALSO SOLDIERS...
I CAN'T TAKE THE CHANCE... I CAN'T RISK SIX MEN'S LIVES. WHOEVER IT WAS IN THAT WINDOW, I'VE GOT TO MAKE SURE...
MACHINE-GUN... TRAVERSE LEFT... UPPER WINDOWS OF FARMHOUSE.. RANGE NINE ZERO ZERO...

THE TWO CORPORALS TURNED AWAY FROM THE TANK AND STOOD LOOKING AT THE FARMHOUSE. THEY HAD NOT HEARD THE COMMANDER'S ORDER, BUT THEY KNEW WHAT IT WOULD BE.

IF THAT *IS* A JERRY SPOTTING POST FOR TANKS OR GUNS UP THE VALLEY, IT'S GOT TO BE CLOBBERED! IT'S US OR THEM!

THE HEAVY CALIBRE MACHINE-GUN BULLETS BROKE AGAINST THE STONE WALL OF THE OLD FARMHOUSE. MOVED VICIOUSLY SIDEWAYS INTO THE GAPING EYE OF THE WINDOW...

THE ROOM HAD BEEN THE MAIN BEDROOM OF THE OLD FARMHOUSE IN PEACETIME. BUT THIS WAS WAR AND WAR CONTAMINATES EVERYTHING IT TOUCHES...

WHEN THE MACHINE GUN STOPPED, CORPORAL NEEDHAM MOVED WARILY FORWARD.
WELL, LET'S GO!

THE TWO CORPORALS MOVED SLOWLY UP THE HILL TOGETHER. THEY DID NOT SPEAK. THE SILENCE WAS TOO HEAVY FOR WORDS. THEY WERE TEN YARDS FROM THE HOUSE WHEN THE DOOR SWUNG OPEN SUDDENLY.
COME ON OUT, THEN... WHOEVER YOU ARE...

THE TOMMY GUNS MENACED THE EMPTY DOORWAY ... BUT IT WAS AN OLD WOMAN WHO SLOWLY CAME OUT FROM IT TO FACE THEM ...
SI ... I COME !! MURDERERS !!

THE GUNS DROPPED. THE UGLY WORD HIT THE TWO MEN AGAIN LIKE A BLOW IN THE FACE AS THEY LOCKED INTO THE FARMHOUSE...
MURDERERS !

THE ITALIANS WERE PEASANTS. THEY WERE AFRAID. CORPORAL NEEDHAM TRAMPED HEAVILY ACROSS THE BARE FLOOR TO THE STAIRS. THE FRIGHTENED EYES FOLLOWED HIM...
UPSTAIRS..

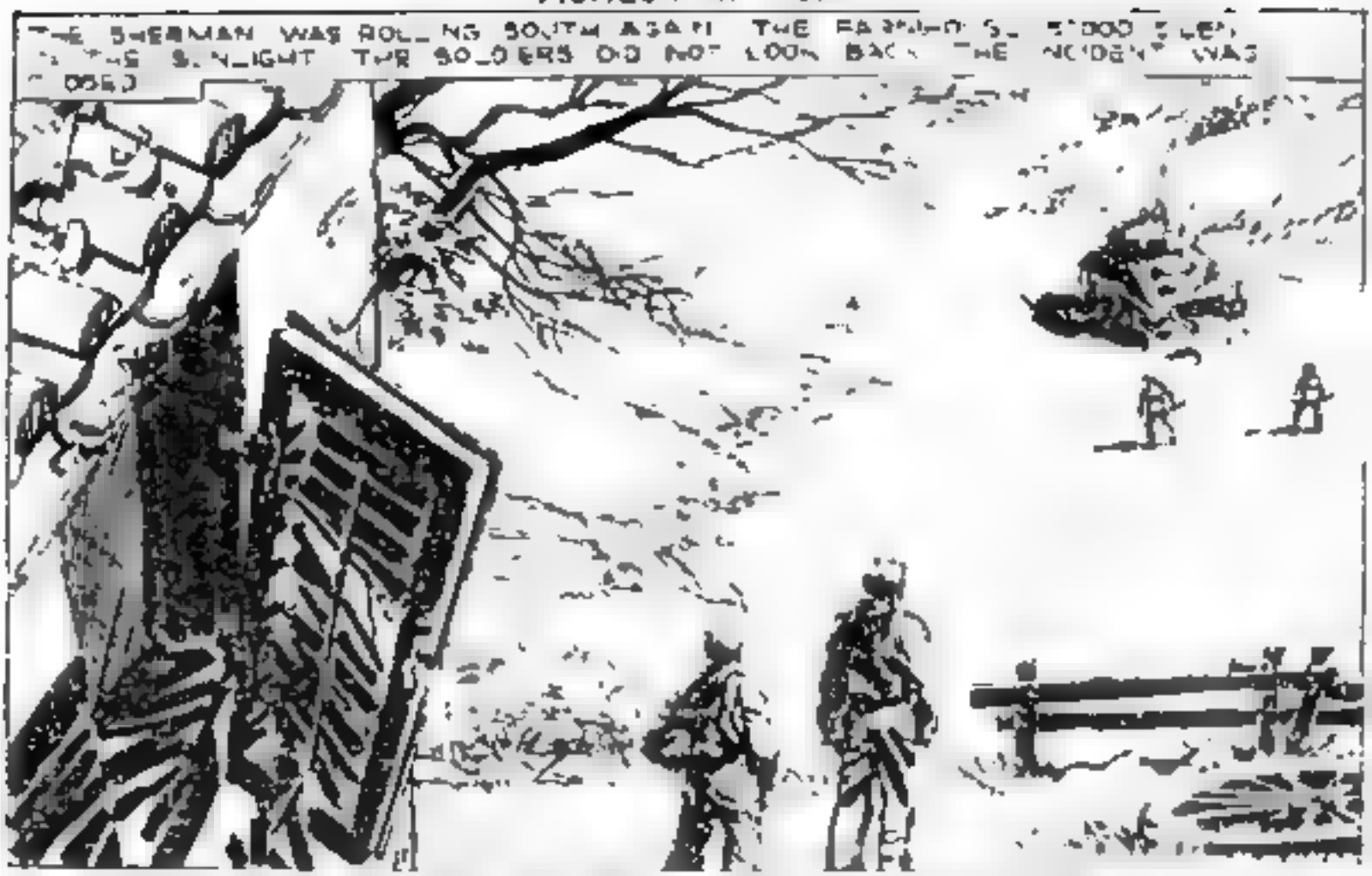
THE ROOM AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS HAD BEEN SCORCHED AND LACERATED BY THE BULLETS. AN OLD MAN LAY THERE, HIS BACK TO THE WALL...

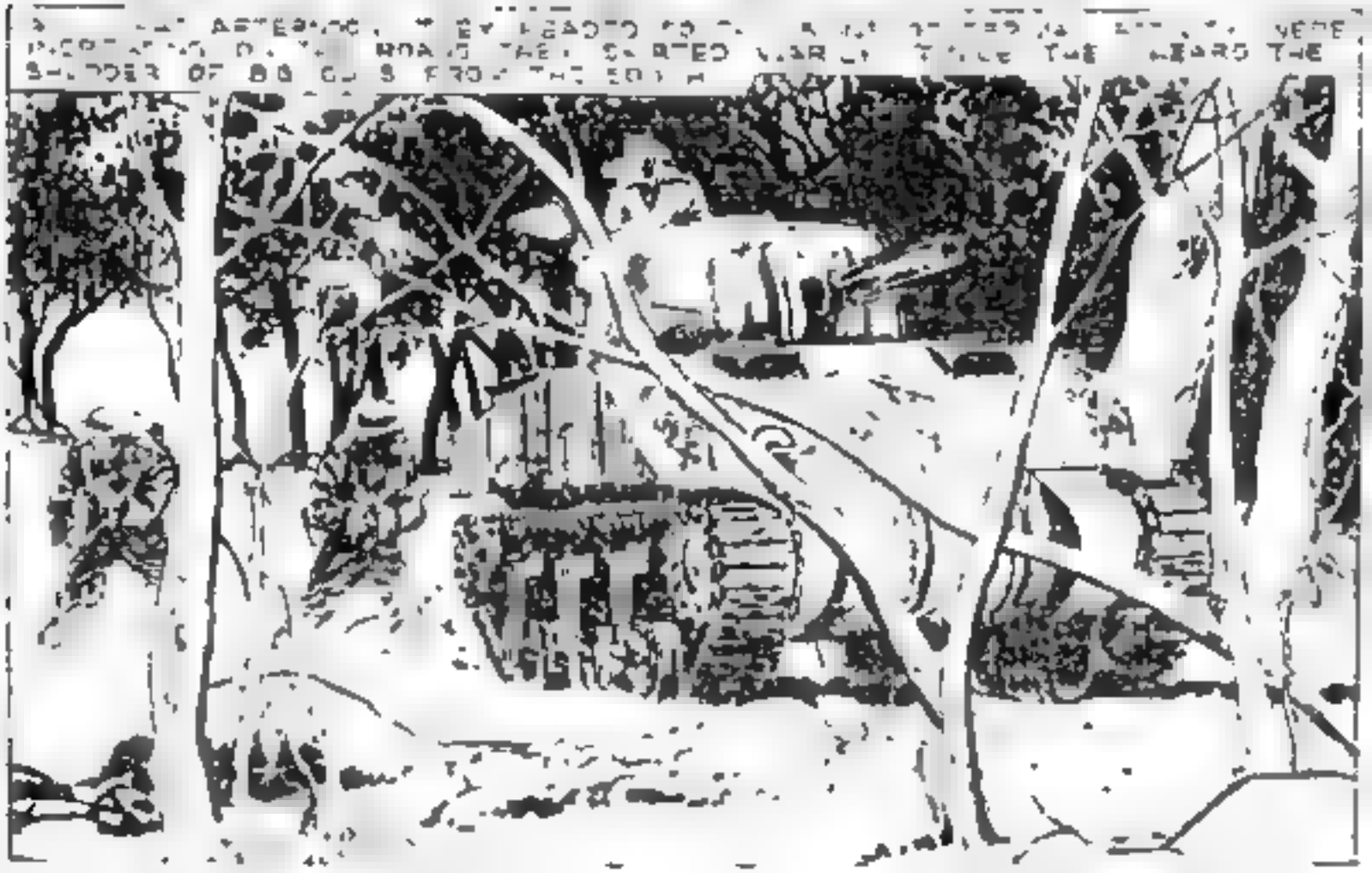
THE FARMHOUSE HAD BEEN A STRATEGIC TARGET IF IT HAD HIDDEN GERMAN TROOPS, THE TANK AND ITS CREW AND THE TWO CORPORALS WOULD HAVE DIED IT HAD HIDDEN ONLY A SCARED ITALIAN FAMILY...
WE COULDN'T KNOW HOW COULD WE!
LEAVE IT, PAL THAT'S THE WAY IT IS!

THE TWO CORPORALS WENT DRY-MOUTHED INTO THE STARS AGAIN. WAR HAD MADE THEM FIGHTERS BUT IT HAD NOT BRUTALIZED THEM. THEY SCREWED AT THEIR NERVES AS THEY CROSSED THE ROOM AND THE SCARED EYES FOLLOWED THEM. PERHAPS THE TWO YOUNG MEN KNEW HOW THEY FELT.
THERE MOTHER YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND.

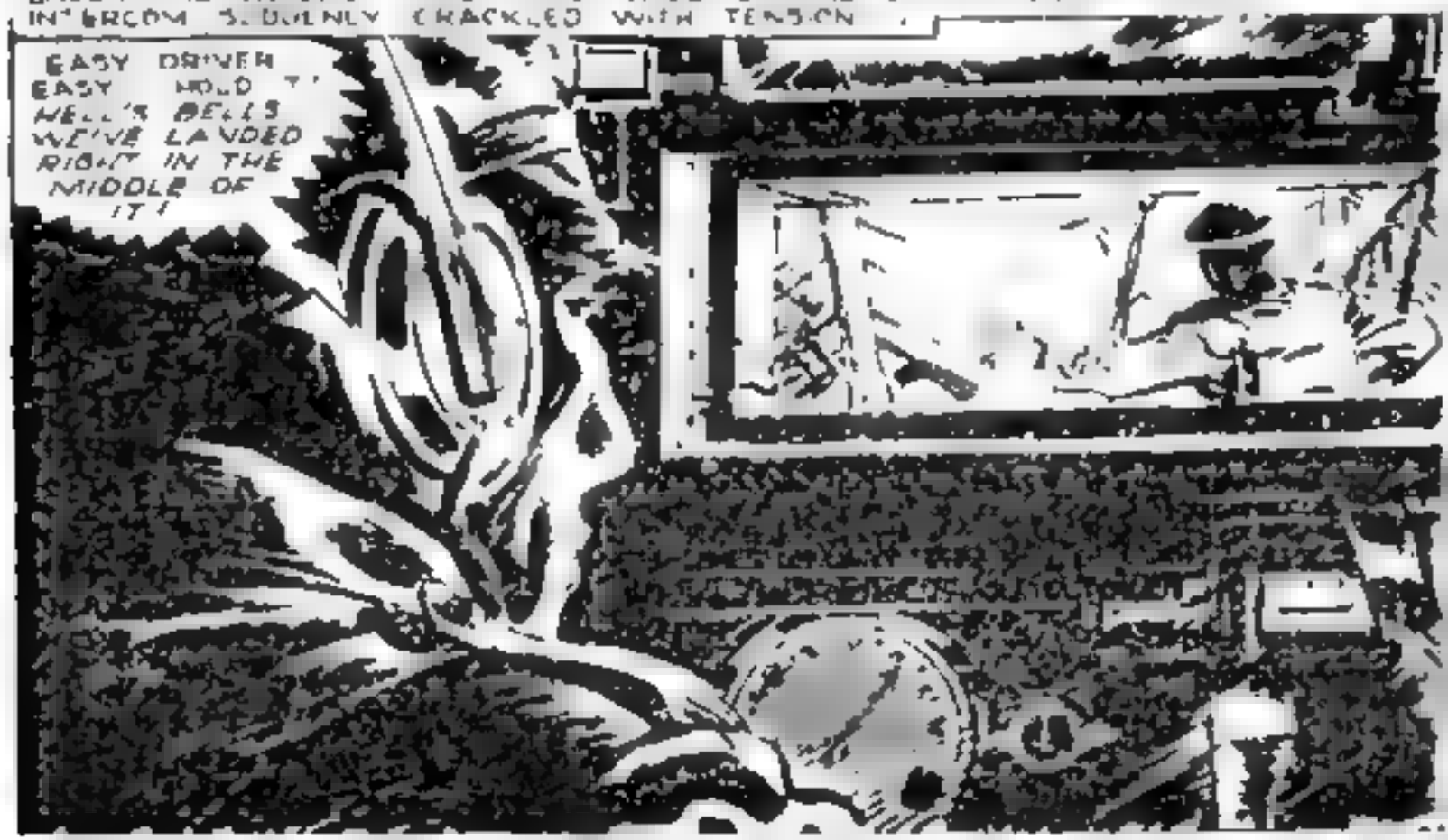
OUTSIDE IN THE BRIGHT SUNLIGHT, THE SHERMAN STOOD. THE COMMANDER LOOKED DOWN FROM THE TURRET. HIS FACE WAS STAFF WITH THE DUST OF THE LONG DAY'S FIGHT AND THE BITTERNESS OF THE FIGHTING.
WE'D LIKE TO SAY SOMETHING FRENCH, BUT I REKON THERE'S NOTHING TO SAY.

THE ITALIAN SPOKE SO THEY HE HELD OUT HIS HAND AND CORPORAL NILSONA TOO. THE HAND SAID MORE THAN THE WORDS COULD DO
SIGNORI YOU ARE A SOLDIER YOU HAVE A JOB TO DO ONE DAY THERE WILL BE AN END OF FIGHTING AND YOU WILL BE MEN AGAIN NOT SOLDIERS AND THE KILLING WILL BE OVER FOR YOU BUT THE TIME IS NOT YET


THE SHERMAN WAS ROLLING SOUTH AGAIN. THE FARMHOUSE STOOD SILENT IN THE SUNLIGHT. THE SOLDIERS DID NOT LOOK BACK. THE INCIDENT WAS CLOSED.

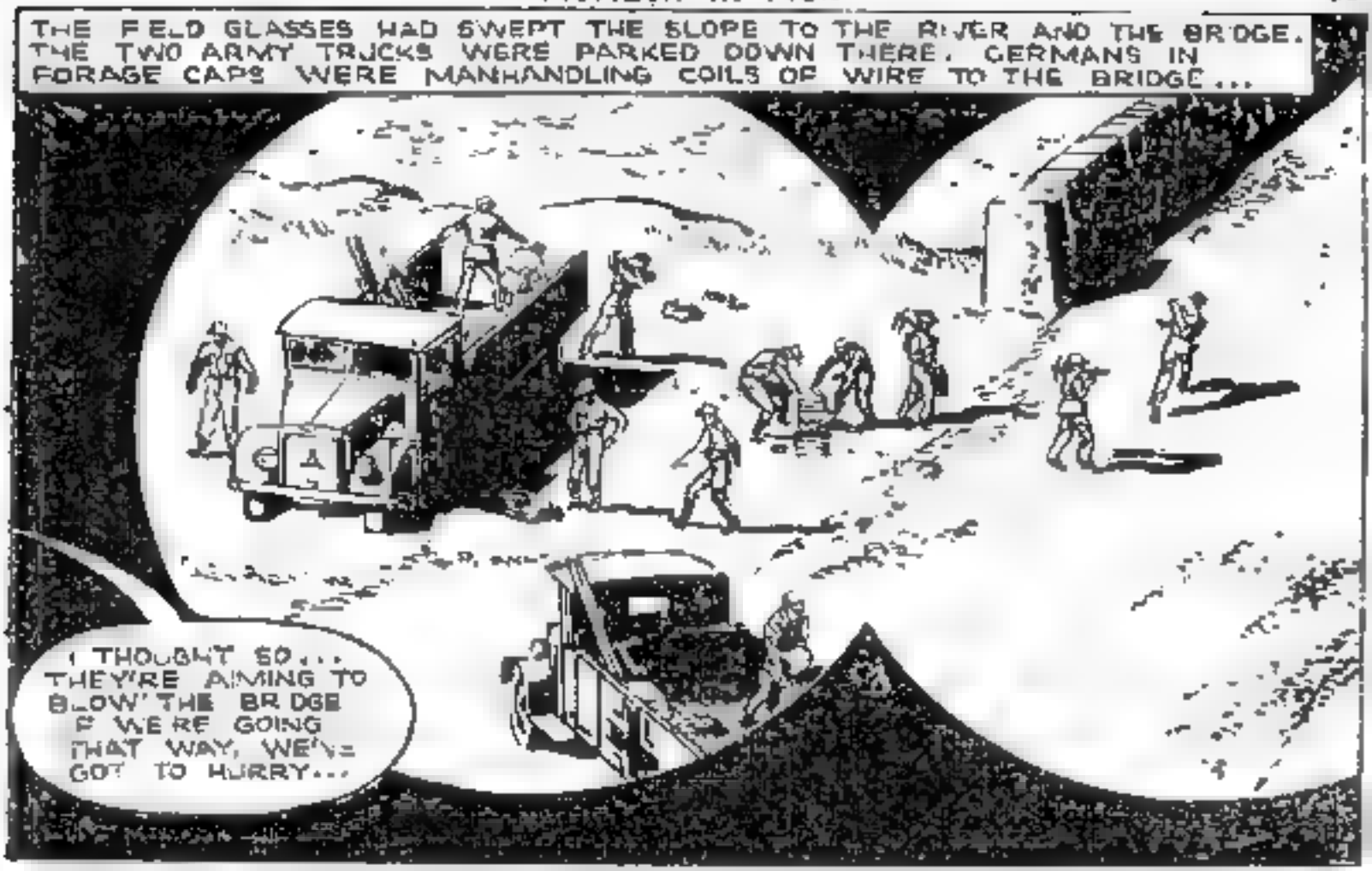

AFTERNOON, THEY HEADED SOUTH. ROAD THEY SKIRTED WARILY. TWICE THE HEARD THE SHUDDER OF BIG GUNS FROM THE SOUTH.

Chapter 5. 1700 Hours



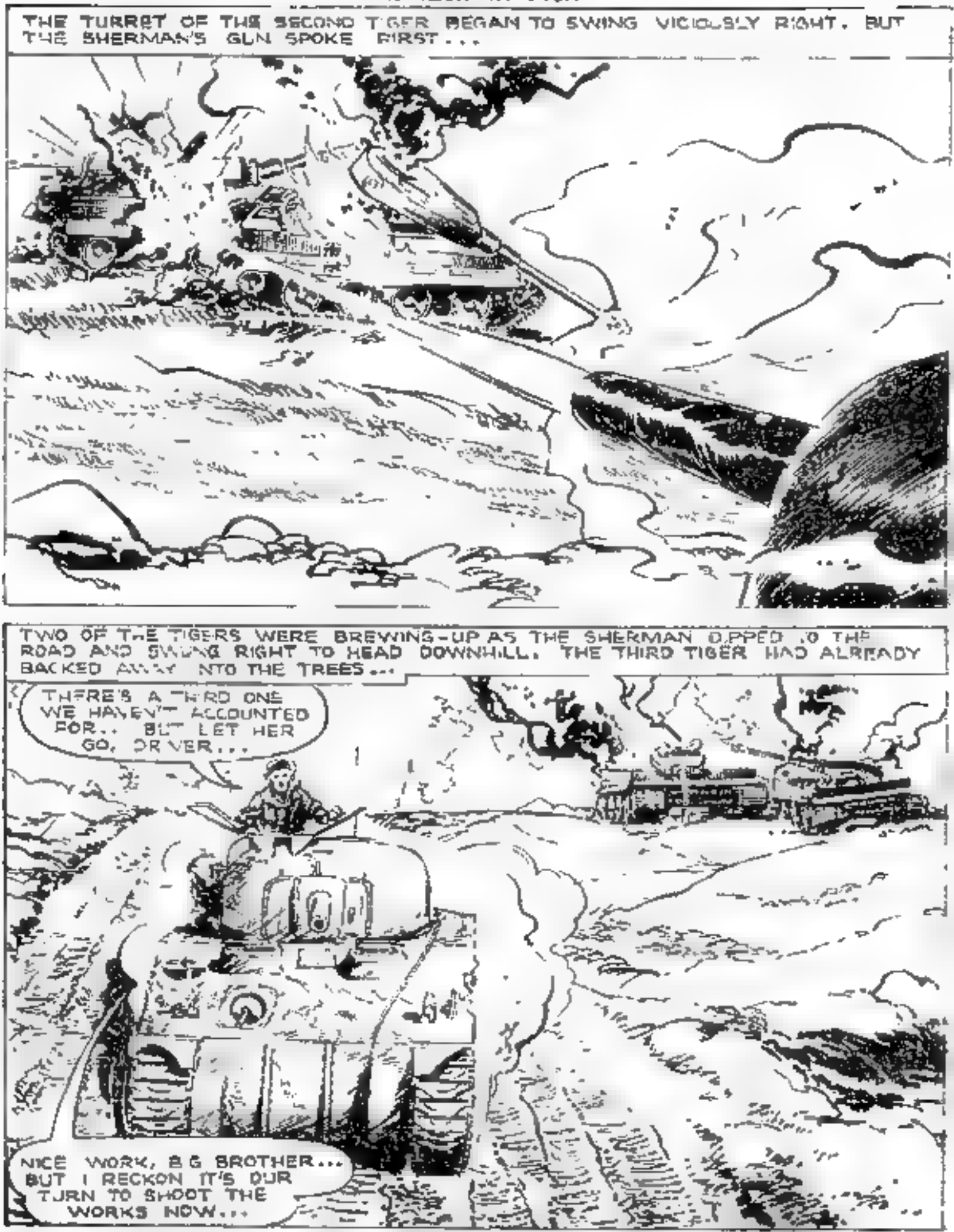
THE SHERMAN WAS POISED ON A HIGH RIDGE OVER A STEEP VALLEY DOWN THE NEAR SLOPE THE GERMANS WERE DIGGING-IN. A RIVER RAN ALONG THE FLOOR OF THE VALLEY AND THE LOW HILLS ON THE FAR SIDE WERE OBVIOUSLY IN ALLIED HANDS...
IT'S THE FRONT LINE ALL RIGHT .. THE JERRIES ARE WAITING FOR OUR CHAPS TO ATTACK ACROSS THE RIVER .. LET'S PINPOINT THE DANGER SPOTS...

Horizon In Hell


THE FELD GLASSES HAD SWEPT THE SLOPE TO THE RIVER AND THE BRIDGE. THE TWO ARMY TRUCKS WERE PARKED DOWN THERE. GERMANS IN FORAGE CAPS WERE MANHANDLING COILS OF WIRE TO THE BRIDGE...
I THOUGHT SO... THEY'RE AIMING TO BLOW THE BRIDGE IF WE'RE GOING THAT WAY, WE'VE GOT TO HURRY...

THE TANK COMMANDER WEIGHED THE EVIDENCE OF THE ENEMY'S STRENGTH AGAINST THE ARMAMENT HE CARRIED, THE SPEED OF HIS ADVANCE, ITS PROBABLE DIRECTION. BALANCING THOSE KNOWN FACTS, HE MADE HIS DECISION...
HEAR THIS, MEN... WE'RE GOING TO BARGE STRAIGHT DOWN THAT ROAD TO THE BRIDGE WITH SURPRISE ON OUR SIDE. BUT WE'VE GOT TO HIT JERRY FIRST AND WE'VE GOT TO HIT HIM HARD! THAT'S ALL! DRIVER... ADVANCE!

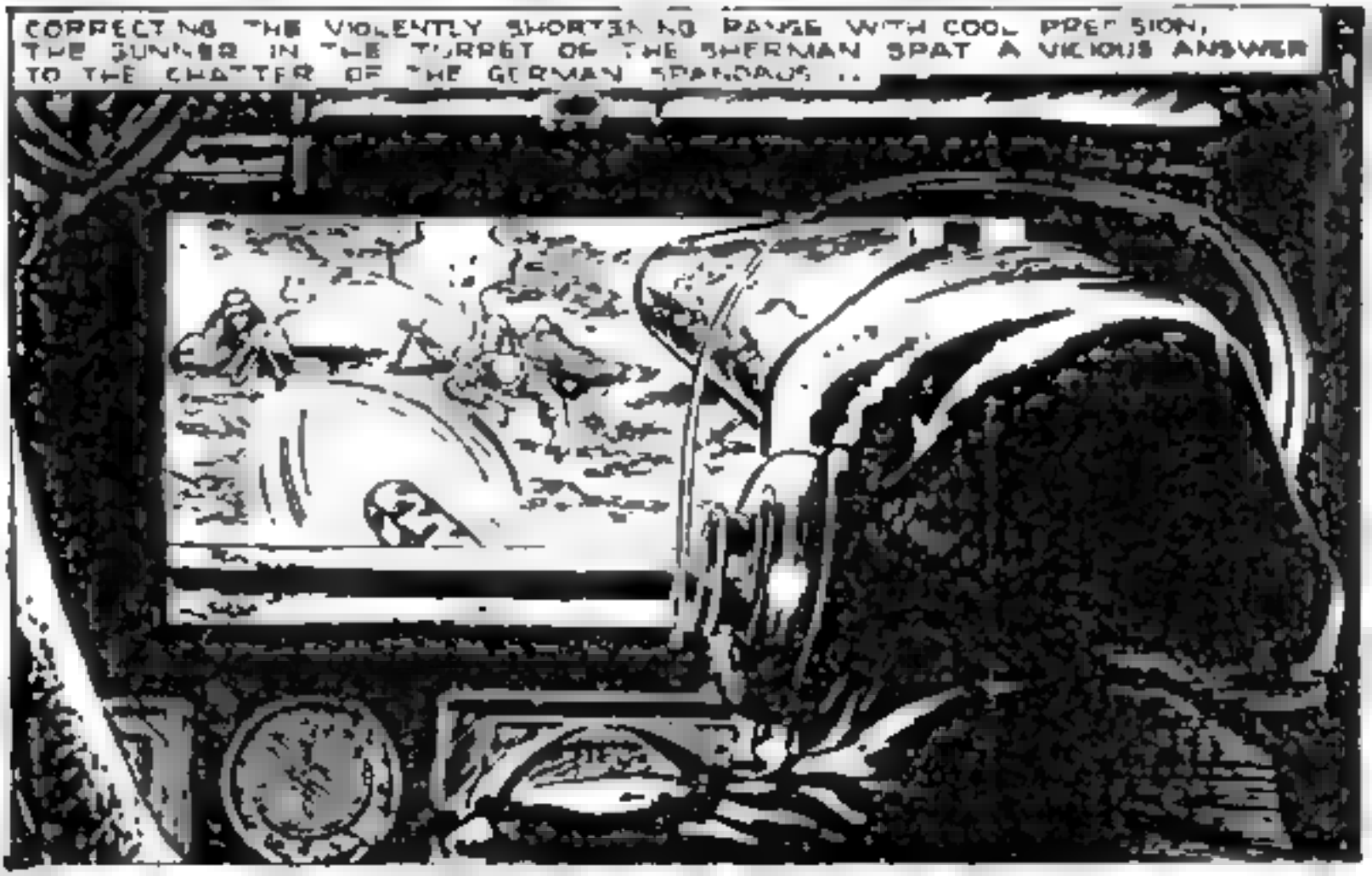
A COMMANDER'S DECISION IN BATTLE IS BASED ON HARD FACT. BUT IN THE SCALES HE BALANCES BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH, THE LAST WEIGHT, AND THE HEAVIEST BY FAR, IS COURAGE
I RECKON THIS IS WHERE WE TAKE A RIDE, BILL
YEAH AND PAY OUR FARE IN BULLETS ..
WHEN THE SHERMAN EMERGED FROM THE TREES, THE THREE BIG GERMAN TANKS WERE CLEAR TARGETS ON THE FARTHER RIDGE AND IN THEIR MOST VULNERABLE POSITION..
TRAVERSE LEFT .. STEADY .. ON NEAREST ENEMY TANK RANGE FOUR ZERO .. FIRE!
THE CRASH OF THE SHERMAN'S SEVENTY FIVE M M GUN WAS THE FIRST WARNING THE GERMANS HAD OF THE PRESENCE OF AN ENEMY TANK THE CREW OF THE NEAREST TIGER IT WAS ALSO THE LAST
ACHTUNG! ENEMY TANK! TRAVERSE RIGHT! SCHNELL!


THE TURRET OF THE SECOND TIGER BEGAN TO SWING VICIOUSLY RIGHT. BUT THE SHERMAN'S GUN SPOKE FIRST...
TWO OF THE TIGERS WERE BREWING-UP AS THE SHERMAN DIPPED TO THE ROAD AND SWUNG RIGHT TO HEAD DOWNHILL. THE THIRD TIGER HAD ALREADY BACKED AWAY INTO THE TREES...
THERE'S A THIRD ONE WE HAVEN'T ACCOUNTED FOR... BUT LET HER GO, DRIVER...
NICE WORK, B.G. BROTHER... BUT I RECKON IT'S OUR TURN TO SHOOT THE WORKS NOW...

THE SHERMAN WAS TRAVELLING FAST. THE TWO GERMAN ANTI-TANK GUNS WERE BEING DRAGGED FEVERISHLY ROUND TO BEAR AND THE SHERMAN'S TURRET WOULD NEVER TRAVERSE QUICKLY ENOUGH TO DEAL WITH THEM.
YOU'VE GOT THE RIGHT IDEA, SQUAREHEADS... BUT YOU GOT IT TOO LATE...

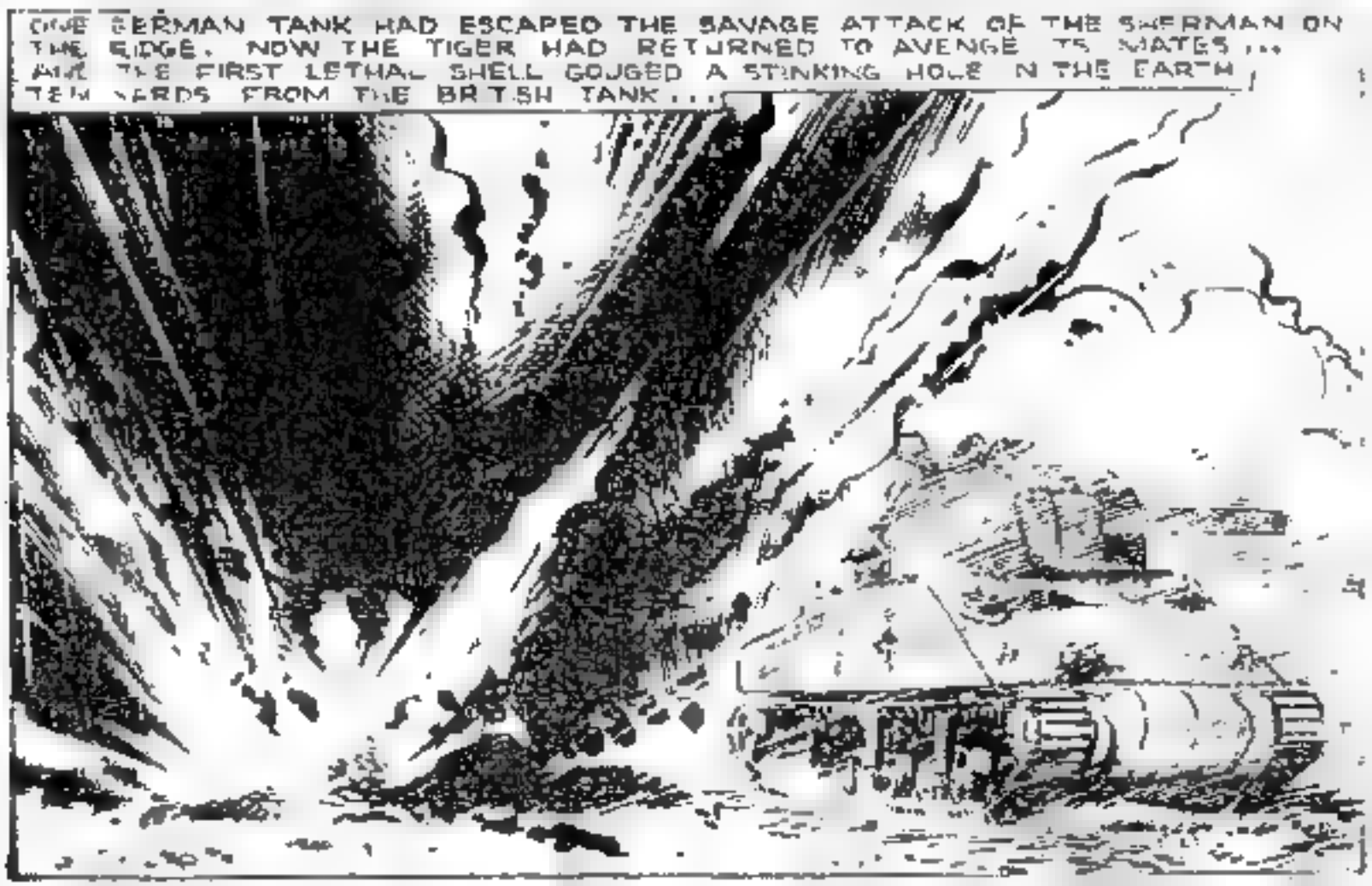
THE SHERMAN'S GUN WAS TRAVERSING BACK AS IT ROARED DOWN THE STEEP ROAD... BUT THE SPITTING MUZZLE OF CORPORAL NEEDHAM'S TOMMY GUN WAS ALREADY ON TARGET...
BELAY THE LAST ORDER, GUNNER.. THE INFANTRYMEN HAVE DEALT WITH IT, ENEMY MACHINE-GUNS AHEAD, ELEVEN O'CLOCK...

THIS WAS NO BLIND CHARGE INTO UNKNOWN DANGER, THE ENEMY STRONG-POINTS HAD BEEN PLOTTED... WERE BEING DEALT WITH ONE BY ONE...
HECK... THE SQUAREHEADS ARE KICKING UP ROUGH...
MACHINE-GUN ACTION... TRAVERSE LEFT... STEADY ... ON ... ENEMY MACHINE-GUN POSTS... RANGE SIX ZERO... FIRE!


CORRECTING THE VIOLENTLY SHORTENING RANGE WITH COOL PRECISION, THE GUNNER IN THE TURRET OF THE SHERMAN SPAT A VICIOUS ANSWER TO THE CHATTER OF THE GERMAN SPANDAUS ...

Horizon In Hell

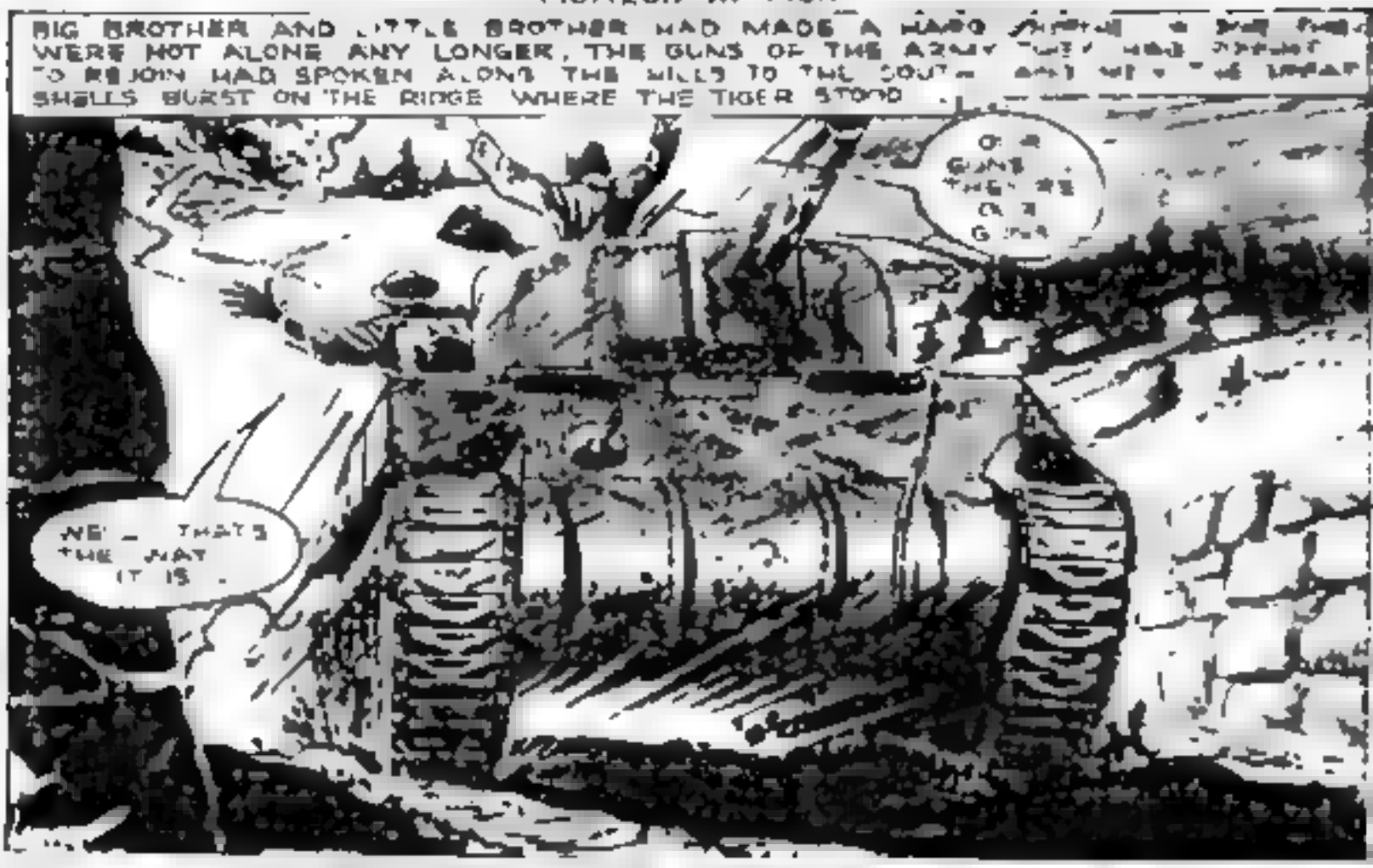
THE BRIDGE WAS THIRTY YARDS AHEAD NOW. ACROSS IT WAS ALLIED TERRITORY AND THE END OF A VIOLENT JOURNEY. BUT ON THE SKYLINE HIGH ABOVE THE VALLEY, A LAST THREAT WAS POSED...

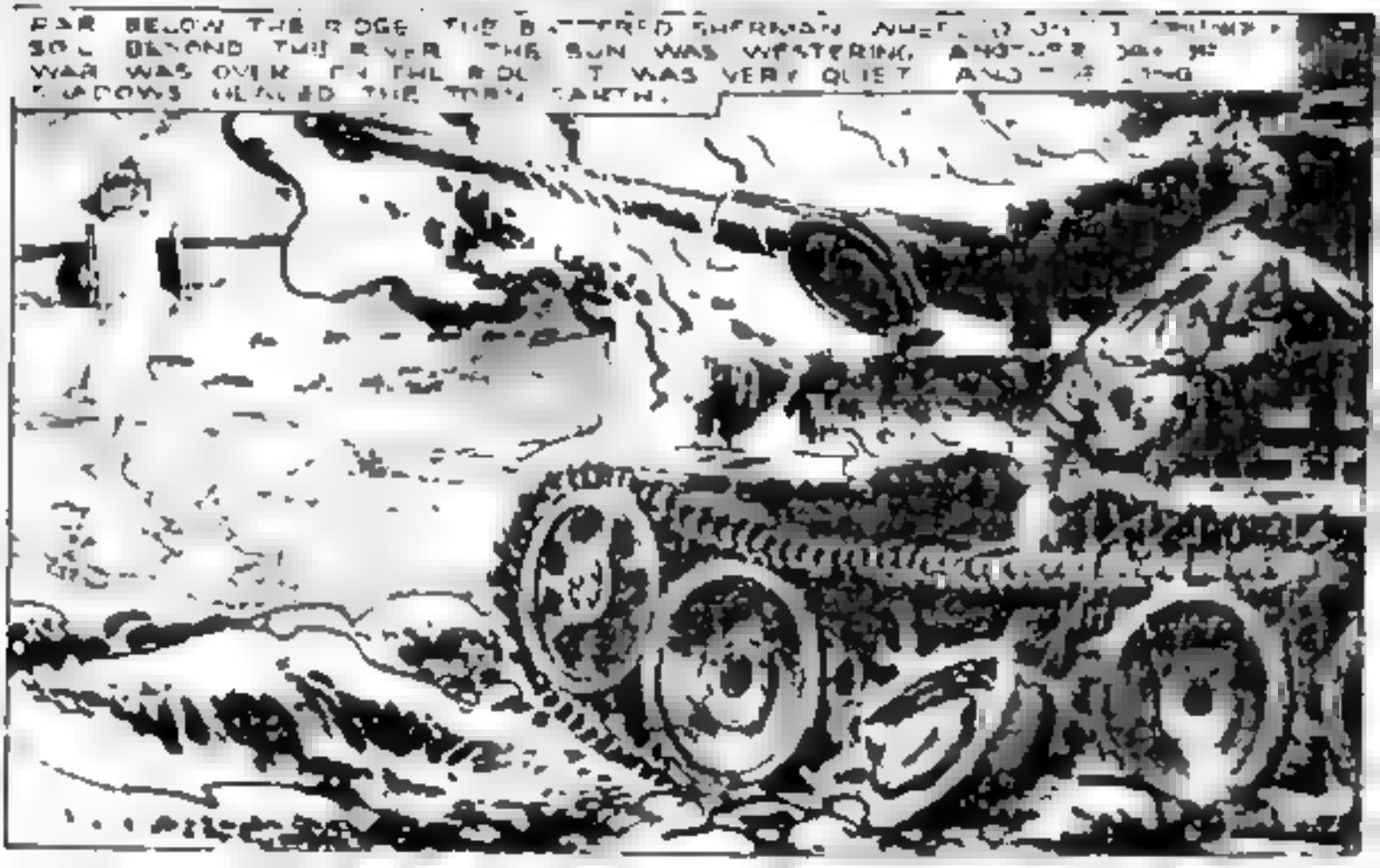

ONE GERMAN TANK HAD ESCAPED THE SAVAGE ATTACK OF THE SHERMAN ON THE RIDGE. NOW THE TIGER HAD RETURNED TO AVENGE ITS MATES... AND THE FIRST LETHAL SHELL GOUGED A STINKING HOLE IN THE EARTH TEN YARDS FROM THE BRITISH TANK...

A HUNGRY BITTERNESS IN HIS VOICE, THE COMMANDER OF THE GERMAN TANK CORRECTED RANGE. THE SHERMAN WAS MOVING FAST, BUT NOW THE ADVANTAGE WAS AGAINST IT. THE TIGER'S ROAR SOUNDED AGAIN...
CORRECT... TRAVERSE LEFT... RANGE NOW EIGHT ZERO FIVE... FIRE!

THE SECOND SHELL FROM THE TIGER FELL TEN YARDS SHORT. THE COMMANDER OF THE SHERMAN LOOKED BACK AT THE RIDGE AND THERE WAS HOPELESSNESS IN HIS VOICE FOR THE FIRST TIME...
IT'S THAT DARNED TIGER... I OUGHT TO HAVE CLIPPED ITS CLAWS. DIRECTLY WE HIT THE BRIDGE IT'LL GET OUR RANGE... AND WE CAN'T CRACK BACK AT IT WHILE IT'S IN THAT HULL DOWN POSITION

THE SHERMAN HAD REACHED THE BRIDGE. FROM THE TURRET OF THE TIGER, THE COMMANDER GRINNED BITTERLY DOWN AT IT. BUT HE WAS TOO INTENT ON HIS VICTIM... OR HE WOULD HAVE SEEN THE FLASHES OF THE HIDDEN GUNS ALONG THE HILLS FAR ACROSS THE VALLEY...
SO... BUT I HAVE YOU NOW, MY FRIEND. YOU CANNOT DODGE ME ON THE BRIDGE... GUNNER, YOU WILL MAKE SURE THIS TIME ..
THE MEN WHO HAD COME BACK WITH THE SHERMAN FROM HELL WERE TWENTY FEET FROM SAFETY. THEY HAD FOUGHT LIKE SOLDIERS... AND THEY WERE READY TO DIE LIKE SOLDIERS IF THEY HAD TO...
ARE WE GOING TO MAKE IT?
MAYBE... MAYBE NOT. BUT WE'VE MADE A DARNED GOOD FIGHT OF IT...


BIG BROTHER AND LITTLE BROTHER HAD MADE A HARD
WERE NOT ALONE ANY LONGER, THE GUNS OF THE
TO REJOIN HAD SPOKEN ALONG THE HILLS TO THE
SHELLS BURST ON THE RIDGE WHERE THE TIGER STOOD
OUR GUNS THEY'RE OUR GUNS
NO - THAT'S THE WAY IT IS


FAR BELOW THE RIDGE
SOUTH BEYOND THE RIVER THE SUN WAS WESTERING,
WAR WAS OVER
SHADOWS

THEY WERE NOT HEROES. THEY WERE MEN WHO HAD FOUGHT THROUGH A LONG DAY AND GOT TO THE END OF IT ALIVE. FOR THEM, THAT WAS VICTORY ENOUGH...
WELL... WE'VE HAD OUR RIDE...
YEAH... AND PAID THE FARE...

THERE WAS AN ADVANCE PATROL OF THE NEW ZEALAND DIVISION AROUND THE BEND IN THE ROAD. THE TWO CORPORALS WERE BACK. THE SHERMAN ROLLED ON ALONE...
WE SAW YOU COMING DOWN THAT SLOPE LIKE A BAT OUT OF HELL... RADIOED FIRE CONTROL TO BLOT OUT THAT TIGER FOR YOU. WHAT THE HECK HAVE YOU BEEN DOING OVER THERE ALONE?
GETTING BACK, CAPTAIN... JUST GETTING BACK... ONLY WE WEREN'T ALONE... WE HAD GOOD COMPANY...

THE WAR IS ONE FIELD WIDE, BUT FOR THE MEN WHO FIGHT ON THEIR FEET THERE IS ALWAYS ANOTHER FIELD TO CROSS. THE STORY IS OVER, BUT THE MEN WHO MADE IT WILL GO ON FIGHTING TOMORROW...

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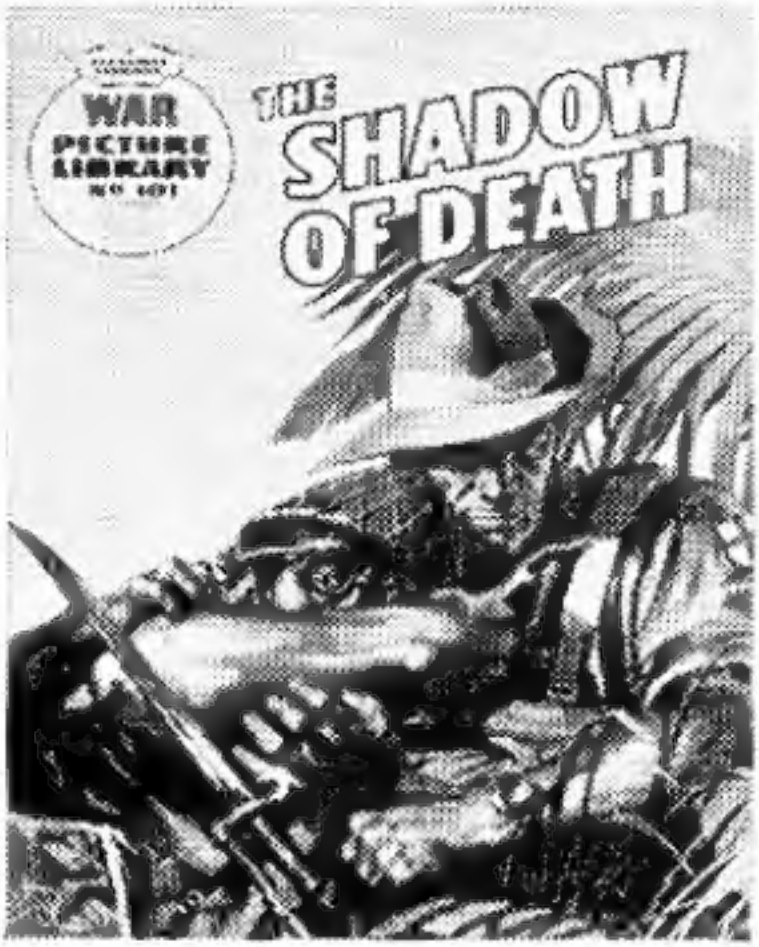

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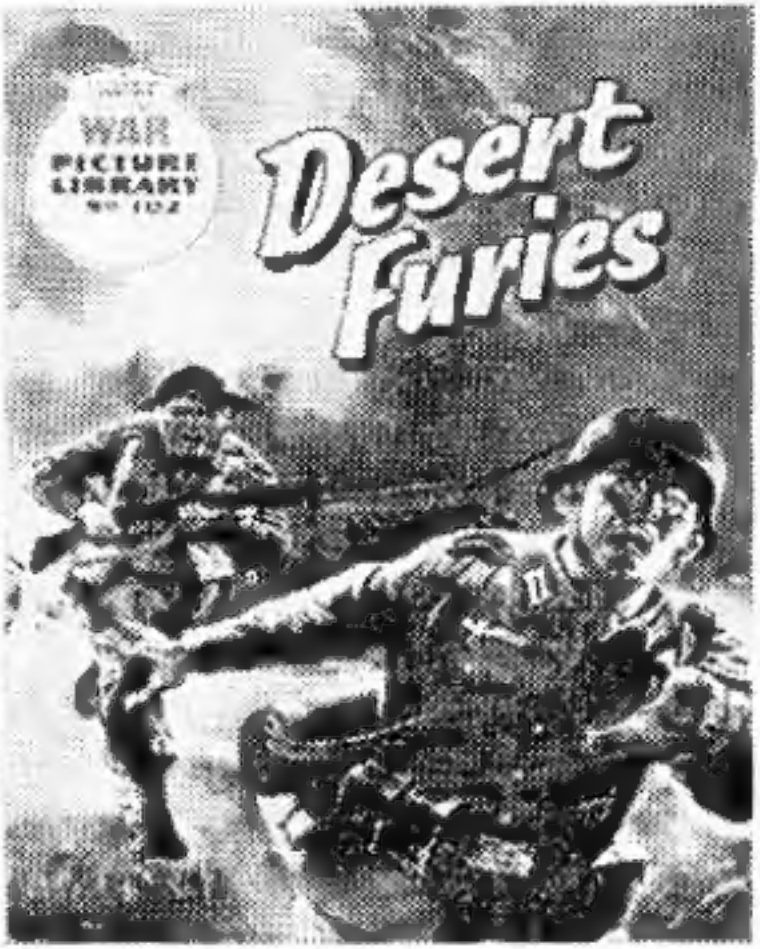

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